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Early Childhood Education Learning Model in Malaysia

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Abstract
A learning model is used to illustrate the learning process. Therefore, selecting the appropriate learning model for children is crucial. Using an appropriate learning model can help achieve educational goals, making the learning process successful when met. This research aims to find out what developmental domains are the focus of early childhood education learning and the learning models applied to early childhood education in Malaysia. This research method is a grounded theory research method. Data collection used interviews, observations, and documents from Malaysia's early childhood education curriculum. The results of this research show that the domain of early childhood education development in Malaysia is holistic development; the learning model includes (a) learning planning based on aspects of development that are used as learning standards, (b) The overall learning strategy for early childhood education in Malaysia must demonstrate active learning and every school must have space or land for children to move, play and do activities, and (c) learning assessment includes the process of monitoring the development of aspects of children which include children's behavior/attitudes, conversations or interactions and children's work through observation.
Keywords: *Holistic Development; Early Childhood Education; Learning Models in Malaysia.*

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Introduction

Early childhood between the ages of birth and 6 years has a very high capacity for processing information, thus everything taught to them can have a significant impact on their physical, cognitive, affective, and psychological development (Saputra, 2018). At this stage, a child experiences various developmental processes that provide a foundation for learning and social interaction in later life. Dini children are also in a unique developmental stage and are quite responsive to the stimuli that are presented (Dilla, 2019; Kristina & Sari, 2021). Giving suitable incitement will bolster the improvement of different angles, such as cognitive work (considering capacity), emotional work (sentiments and feelings), and psychomotor work (body development and engine abilities) (Christin Souisa et al., 2024; Pertiwi et al., n.d.).

Stimulation is understood as one of the learning models; in other words, choosing the right learning model will serve as an appropriate stimulus to maximize a child's development (Christin Souisa et al., 2024). Early childhood learning models have a significant relevance to various aspects of a child's development. This is because the learning model influences how

children learn, interact, and develop. A well-designed learning model can adequately meet the developmental needs of children. The learning model should serve as a tool to support the developmental input for children. Additionally, it acts as a reference for teachers to assess the success of children's learning activities. Therefore, learning models are closely interconnected with the developmental aspects of children.

Early childhood education in Malaysia is a well-established system. Since the 1950s, the country has implemented preschool education programs (Munastiwi & Rahmatullah, 2021). Throughout its evolution, early childhood education in Malaysia has significantly improved its management and teaching methods. It is intriguing to examine the specific developmental areas prioritized in Malaysia's early childhood education and the teaching models applied. This education system caters to children from birth to six years, focusing on providing both education and care. The primary objective is to enrich children's learning experiences by aligning them with their age, individual needs, and capabilities, thereby fostering their holistic development (Rahmatullah et al., 2021)

A learning model refers to a structured approach or strategy employed in curriculum design, instructional management, and providing direction for teachers in classrooms or various educational settings (Masnur, 2020). Moreover, a learning model is a carefully designed framework or plan that acts as an essential tool for promoting effective learning in classrooms or tutoring sessions (Julaeha & Erihadiana, 2021). According to Shilpy, a learning model is a conceptual structure that defines an organized approach for arranging educational activities and experiences aimed at attaining particular learning objectives and competencies (octavia shilphy, 2020).

lavin further describes a learning model as an integrated collection of strategic elements that can lead to improved results in particular contexts (Masnur, 2020). Additionally, Masnur suggests that a learning model provides a structured approach to arranging educational experiences aimed at meeting learning goals (Masnur, 2020). In conclusion, a learning model can be defined as a collection of tools that serves as a framework for facilitating the learning process, including the strategies, techniques, and methods used to present content to students.

Providing learning experiences for children serves as a means of stimulation that fosters the development of well-rounded individuals who can grow and progress in line with their developmental levels, while also equipping them for readiness to learn in school (Mardliyah, 2023). The learning process is represented through a learning model. As a result, it is important to carefully choose the appropriate learning model for children. Selecting the right learning model can significantly contribute to the achievement of educational objectives (Albina et al., 2022). Thus, when the learning goals are met, the learning process can be deemed successful. It is evident that the learning model plays a crucial role, as it outlines the activities to be carried out during the interactions between teachers and students, aiming to achieve learning outcomes in an effective and efficient manner.

In the context of early childhood, the learning models employed by teachers aim to enhance various aspects of child development and foster their multiple intelligences. Beyond maximizing developmental areas, learning is viewed as an important stimulus that encourages brain activity, leading to the production of essential hormones for growth. Stimulation can take many simple forms that are easy to implement. It refers to the encouragement provided to children, allowing them to explore and learn about their environment. These forms of stimulation can be straightforward, such as through touch, smiles, or hugs, as well as through verbal interactions and activities that engage different aspects of development. This includes sensory skills involving the five senses (hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste), as well as motor, cognitive, and social skills (Upahita, 2023).

According to Imroatun, early childhood education models represent the strategies employed by educators to implement diverse methods for effectively and efficiently delivering learning content to children under eight years old. The goal is to meet established educational

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objectives and prepare these children for primary education (Imroatun, 2021). Sigit Purnama offers another perspective, stating that early childhood learning models can be viewed as structured plans or frameworks that serve as guidelines for evaluating classroom learning. These models include various components, such as teaching approaches, learning activities, classroom management, and the overall learning environment (Purnama & Hayati, 2023).

Rahman asserts that a learning model is a carefully crafted tool created by specialists that integrates various strategies, approaches, techniques, and methods into a unified system specifically designed for early childhood education (Rahman, 2019). Moreover, the learning model is a key medium for facilitating education, which means that educators must be knowledgeable about the methods, techniques, and strategies used in the learning process for children (Dilla, 2019). According to Emy, the learning model is seen as an activity that encompasses the various steps, methods, and techniques selected to offer support, resources, and guidance to children in reaching their educational goals (Yuliartina, 2021).

When examined closely, today's early childhood learning models are closely connected to theories surrounding early childhood education. Historically, early childhood education has evolved alongside our understanding of learning and the characteristics of childhood. This viewpoint emphasizes how children learn and develop, leading to a greater focus on addressing children's needs within the educational framework. Attitudes toward children have shifted over the generations; for instance, in the early 15th century, children were often regarded as blank slates awaiting the inscriptions of those who would write upon them (Edwards, 2009).

As time has progressed, numerous theories and philosophies have developed to support early childhood education, including those proposed by Froebel, Montessori, and Piaget. The educational approaches established by these pioneers have inspired contemporary theorists like Vygotsky, Rogoff, Gardner, and Reggio Emilia, enriching the understanding of early childhood education. Throughout its development, early childhood education theories have been divided into two categories: foundational and contemporary theories. Foundational theories prioritize aspects such as open-ended activities, role play in learning, and the use of natural materials in educational settings. In contrast, contemporary theories focus on socio-cultural experiences that shape child development and emphasize providing learning experiences that meet children's needs within their specific community contexts (Edwards, 2009).

Every country holds its own perspectives and regulations concerning education. The evolution of education in a particular country can offer valuable insights into how education is managed elsewhere. The diverse viewpoints on early childhood education discussed earlier contribute to enhancing the management and delivery of learning. This is in line with the consensus among different stakeholders to direct educational practices toward a common framework or objective, particularly as established by the education ministries in each nation.

Methodology

This study employed a grounded theory approach to explore the early childhood education learning models implemented in Malaysia. The grounded theory approach was chosen to allow the researchers to understand the applied learning models in-depth without relying on pre-established tools, methods, or frameworks. The research was conducted at Tadika Mutiara Hati, Gombak, Malaysia.

Data were collected through three primary methods: in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with teachers and the principal to gather insights into the learning strategies, teaching methods, and assessment practices employed in early childhood education. Observations were carried out during the learning process to capture teacher-student interactions, classroom activities, and the overall learning environment. Document analysis focused on reviewing Malaysia’s early childhood education curriculum, daily lesson plans, and records of children’s development.

The study sample consisted of teachers and the principal at Tadika Mutiara Hati as primary informants, along with young children actively participating in classroom activities. The research was conducted over a specified period at Tadika Mutiara Hati, chosen as it exemplifies the implementation of Malaysia's national preschool curriculum.

Data analysis followed a systematic process. Initially, key terms and recurring themes were identified from the collected data. These terms were then organized into broader conceptual categories: learning strategies, holistic approaches, and assessment methods. Finally, these categories were synthesized to develop an overarching understanding of the learning models applied at the institution.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the findings, this study employed methodological triangulation, incorporating data from interviews, observations, and document analysis. Source triangulation was also applied by cross-referencing information from teachers, the principal, and official curriculum documents. Peer debriefing sessions were conducted to enhance the consistency and credibility of the results.

This research is limited by its focus on a single early childhood education institution, which may constrain the generalizability of its findings. However, the study offers valuable insights that can serve as a foundation for future research involving a broader range of institutions across Malaysia..

Results and Discussion

The domains of child development that are the focus of early childhood education in Malaysia.

The development of children becomes the focus in designing an early childhood education curriculum. Fundamentally, the development of the early childhood education curriculum is based on the underlying assumptions that support its implementation. However, it is also important to understand that each country will differ in determining the direction and goals of education. It is known that, in theory, early childhood education is closely related to efforts to develop aspects of child development. To determine the direction of a child's education, one can look at the aspects of development that are the focus of early childhood education.

> "*The concept of early childhood education in Malaysia adopts a holistic development system.*" *It means developing all aspects of a child's growth.* "*There are cognitive, physical, language, humanitarian, and other aspects*."

Based on the Malaysian curriculum document, it is found that in kindergarten, six aspects of development are fostered in early childhood education, known as pillars. The six pillars are the pillar of communication, the pillar of spirituality, attitudes and values, the pillar of personal skills, the pillar of physical and aesthetic development, the pillar of science and technology, and the pillar of humanity. The domain of early childhood education development in Malaysia adopts a holistic development perspective. This means that early childhood education in Malaysia strives to develop all aspects of a child's growth. 6 aspects are developed, referred to as support, namely communication support, spiritual support, attitudes and values, self-skills support, physical and aesthetic development support, science and technology support, and humanitarian support.

The process of child development is dynamic and individualized. We can provide our kids the best assistance possible so they grow and develop to their full potential if we grasp the various facets of development (Talango, 2020). The physical, cognitive, linguistic, and social-emotional components of development are among the many facets of development that are included in early childhood education curricula. Since these four developmental features must be developed via play activities every day at school, instructors utilize the accomplishment indicators for each of these developmental aspects as a guide for creating

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developmental activities. A quick description of the early life development components will be provided below.

Table 1. Development Domains

Development Domain	Subdomain
Communication	Malay English Chinese Tamil
Spirituality, Attitude and Values Self-Skills	Islamic Education, Islamic Education
Physical and Aesthetic Development	Physical Development and Maintaining Health Certivitivit and Aesthetics
Science and Technology Humanity	Early Science, Early Mathematics

Physical growth comes first. Children's physical development is defined as the growth of their body dimensions along with improved muscle mass and decreased body fat, which tends to make them appear slender. Boys and girls often develop physically in similar ways, with the exception of girls being significantly lighter and smaller. The two categories of early childhood physical development are gross motor and fine motor (Koza, 2004). The term "gross motor" describes a child's spatial awareness and capacity to move their entire body. Climbing, running, and leaping are examples of gross motor abilities. As children get older, their gross motor activity tend to increase. Gross motor skills allow youngsters to move from one location to another and call for practice with equipment such as bicycles, balls, and balancing beams. The capacity of a youngster to use and regulate their little hand muscles is referred to as fine motor skills. Activities including coloring, writing, drawing, and cutting can help students develop fine motor skills. Since fine motor development sharply rises after the age of three, it is crucial that toddlers get constant stimulation, particularly in this area.

Cognitive growth comes in second. The term cognitive ability describes a child's capacity to focus on a job, finish it, and identify letters, colors, forms, and categories. Children can directly discover and rediscover via "exposure," which aids in the development of cognitive capacities. Children's cognitive talents will flourish if they derive personal significance from their activities. Language development comes in third. The capacity of a youngster to read, write, and communicate is referred to as language development. Like learning to walk, a child's capacity to talk depends on their own growth. A toddler that is two years old can speak one or two words. He or she will eventually start stringing words together to form sentences and phrases. The child's vocabulary will have grown to several thousand words by the time he is five years old. He will be able to tell short stories and engage in lengthy discussions with grownups.

Social-emotional development comes in fourth. The ability of a youngster to communicate their emotions and engage with others is referred to as social emotional development. Family dynamics and parenting practices have a significant impact on social and emotional development. Teachers can adopt learning practices that force friends to work together in the classroom as a way to maximize the social and emotional development of their students (Koza, 2004).

The learning models applied in early childhood education in Malaysia.

The methodical procedures used to plan children's learning experiences in order to meet learning objectives are known as early childhood learning models (Abidin & Asy'ari, 2023). The plans, methods, ways, and strategies used for children ages 0–6 to meet their

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physical, cognitive, religious, and moral needs as well as their language, gross motor–fine motor, social-emotional, artistic, and creative needs can be interpreted as early childhood learning models. Creating a positive learning environment for kids may also be accomplished through early childhood learning models. Early childhood development is influenced by two types of influences: internal and external forces (Khadijah & Amelia, 2020). Family environment, genetics, health and nutrition, and educational experiences are examples of internal variables. The social and cultural context, the surrounding environment, and the accessibility of resources are examples of external variables.

In its implementation, the learning model is very important in early childhood education, because the right learning model will be a strong foundation for children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. the right learning model will encourage optimal child development, make the learning process fun, adapt to the characteristics of children, meet the needs of holistic development and build a strong foundation for further education. (Amelia & Marini, 2022). In early childhood education, selecting the appropriate learning paradigm is crucial. Teachers may design a learning environment that is enjoyable, productive, and promotes kids' healthy growth by selecting and implementing suitable learning models (Susanti, 2021).

Learning Planning

Learning planning is understood as a process of designing a learning plan that includes learning objectives, analysis of learning needs, and teaching methods. In carrying out and designing learning plans, it is based on what developmental aspects will be developed. Based on the Malaysian government's document on the National Preschool Standard Curriculum, the 2020 Preschool Education Curriculum Alignment document does not specify learning through themes, but rather through subjects. The subject comes from books that consist of 6 components, namely communication support, spiritual support, attitudes and values, self-skills support, physical and aesthetic development support, science and technology support, and humanitarian support. Each pillar (similar to aspects of development) has a main focus of development.

Learning strategies

Strategy is the tactic or art of designing a plan or technique that will be used to achieve a desired outcome. Strategy is also essential in carrying out any planning to ensure it is executed efficiently and runs smoothly. Learning is a process of remembering, acquiring knowledge, and a process that can be done anywhere and anytime in obtaining a truth or a skill that can be mastered and used according to one's needs. Thus, the learning strategy is a process, technique, method determination, and steps in learning that are set by the educator to help students learn more efficiently and optimally.

> "*The early childhood education learning strategy in Malaysia must demonstrate active learning. This requires that every school must have space or land for children to move, play, and engage in activities*."

In relation to this, several strategies have been put forth by the Ministry of Education of Malaysia, including learning through play, child-centered learning, project-based learning, contextual learning, and mastery learning. The learning strategy through play is a strategy that provides children with the opportunity to learn in a free, safe, happy, and meaningful environment. Child-centered learning is an approach that involves children taking an important role in the learning process, as it is driven by their interests, motivations, and needs. Project-based learning is an approach that emphasizes practical tasks over a planned period, engaging children to study a topic and produce a product. Contextual learning is an approach that integrates learning topics with individuals' daily experiences, communities, and work

environments. Mastery learning is an approach that ensures all students achieve the desired learning outcomes for a particular unit before moving on to the next lesson.

Furthermore, based on observations of the learning strategies implemented at Tadika Mutiara Hati, it was found that a variety of learning strategies are applied to support the holistic development of the children. First, the strategy of learning through play is highly prioritized. Various interactive and engaging educational games are provided to stimulate children's cognitive, motor, and social skills. The children are invited to play while learning, so they don't feel burdened and are more enthusiastic about participating in learning activities. Secondly, child-centered learning is implemented with a flexible approach that is responsive to the needs and interests of each child. The teachers at Tadika Mutiara Hati give children the opportunity to choose activities they enjoy and help them explore topics that capture their interest. The teachers act as facilitators who support and guide the children in their learning process. Next, project-based learning is implemented by involving children in small, challenging, and enjoyable projects. For example, children are invited to create art together or design a small garden in the schoolyard. Through these projects, children learn to collaborate, think critically, and develop their creativity. Learning is conducted contextually by linking the subject matter to children's daily situations and experiences. For example, when learning about animals, children are invited to visit the zoo or observe animals in their school environment. This helps children understand concepts better and apply the knowledge they gain in their daily lives. Finally, mastery learning is applied by ensuring that each child truly masters certain skills before moving on to the next skill. The teacher provides ongoing assessments and constructive feedback, allowing the children to continuously improve their skills.

The early childhood education learning strategy in Malaysia must demonstrate active learning. This requires that every school has space or areas for children to move, play, and engage in activities. Referring to the national preschool standard curriculum issued by the Ministry of Education Malaysia, there are several recommended strategies to be implemented in the classroom, namely, (1) learning through play, (2) child-centered learning, (3) project-based learning, (4) contextual learning, and (5) mastery learning.

In the sphere of education, a teacher who anticipates positive consequences from the learning process will also implement methods to ensure that the learning outcomes of their students are favorable. In order to successfully and efficiently accomplish learning objectives, Kemp underlined that "learning strategies are learning activities that teachers and students must do." To generate effective and efficient learning, instructors must be able to use all available learning resources, materials, and learning environments through learning techniques. According to J. Black (Isbah et al., 2022), From an early age, children develop rapidly. Childhood, in Suryani's opinion, is defined as the years 0–6. A child's brain growth from an early age is known to account for almost 80% of the entire developmental process, according to study from the General Department of Early Childhood Education. The growth and development of a kid actually begins in the fourth month of pregnancy.

Specific learning objectives for the development of the physical-motor, cognitive, social-emotional, linguistic, and aesthetic domains are among the crucial factors that educators must take into account when selecting instructional methodologies. Along with these facets of the subject, it may help kids grow in their comprehension of ethics and values. The various traits and skills of the students, the classroom setting, and the instructional resources used are additional factors to take into account (Nuraeni, 2014). Encouraging children to become active learners is one of the key benefits of active learning practices for early life. The design of education must also be innovative in order to introduce children to learning and specific knowledge, skills, and abilities through observation, research, exploration, discussion, conclusions, and various disclosures about various items found in their surroundings (Hafizah et al., 2021).

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Learning Assessment

Assessment is a process to determine the achievements that have been met by children and is conducted to gather information about students' developmental abilities. Assessment is carried out through a very systematic and continuous process with the aim of collecting information to understand the follow-up actions from the learning process. The assessment system within the children's education curriculum in Malaysia explains that the evaluation process must refer to the development and progress of the students.

The assessment activities include the process of monitoring the development of children's aspects, ranging from cognitive, affective, to psychomotor. The activity was carried out through observation. The focus of the observation is the behavior/attitude of the children, their conversations or interactions, and the works produced by the students that already exist. In the observation process, teachers must pay attention to several established indicators. The indicators set are related to the level of student development. The indicators referred to are as follows: (1) children must know basic skills or understand fundamental concepts, (2) children are able to use knowledge or skills to carry out an activity, (3) children are capable of applying knowledge and skills to creatively and systematically implement something in a given situation. In practice, there is no standard assessment report, but it is still necessary to adhere to the indicators and standards when evaluating children.

The evaluation procedure used to gauge children's progress and understanding in an educational setting is known as learning assessment. This evaluation looks at a number of topics, including knowledge, attitudes, and skills, with the goal of determining how well kids have mastered the fundamentals. In order to prepare for future learning and to give parents and teachers feedback on their children's growth, this evaluation is crucial. The purpose of assessment is to enable appropriate follow-up on any challenges that arise during the child's learning process (Dilla, 2019). Additionally, the assessment is conducted to inform the instructor about the developmental accomplishments of the child, which serves as the basis for the teacher's appraisal of the tactics used. It truly concentrates on what you wish to measure in terms of forms or assessment methods that are pertinent to early childhood development. in order to adapt the selected evaluation method to the subject of the assessment. For instance, teachers might employ test methods or construct a piece of work to gauge the cognitive talents of their students. As a result, the instructor can determine the skills that the students have attained based on their developmental markers.

When it comes to developing a learning model, the teacher's involvement is crucial. Establishing a favorable learning environment is the teacher's responsibility as a manager and facilitator. This include setting up the classroom's physical layout, planning educational activities, and fostering effective teacher-student communication. For children to learn effectively and efficiently and to support many facets of their development, teachers must be able to establish engaging and pleasant learning environments (Wulandari & Nurjaman, 2023). The instructor has a number of crucial responsibilities when it comes to providing a positive atmosphere for the kids. To keep students interested, teachers should employ engaging learning materials and make sure the classroom is organized, tidy, and pleasant. Teachers must also use entertaining techniques to create a positive learning environment.

To preserve student learning discipline, teachers must also actively patrol the classroom to keep an eye on issues and address them. Teachers need to be aware of how students' physical and mental conditions affect a positive learning environment. As a result, educators play a crucial part in fostering an environment that facilitates effective and efficient learning. In early childhood education, the teacher's responsibility to provide a secure learning environment for kids encompasses a number of crucial elements. First and foremost, instructors serve as facilitators, assisting kids in developing their own knowledge via experience and making them feel secure and at ease as they study. Additionally, instructors must provide a peaceful and encouraging environment in their role as caretakers, which makes children feel safe, especially when facing emotional difficulties (Basri, 2019).

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In addition, teachers are excellent role models for children, teaching them via imitation and observation how to behave in social situations. In order to promote transparency and a clear grasp of the realities and expectations in educational institutions, it is also critical for teachers to communicate effectively with both parents and students. Lastly, instructors may assist kids see their development and feel appreciated in the learning process by giving them good feedback through constructive evaluation. By integrating these responsibilities, teachers may establish a secure and encouraging learning environment for kids.

Conclusion

Early childhood education development in Malaysia focuses on holistic development, including communication, spirituality, attitudes and values, self-skills, physical and aesthetic, science and technology, and humanity. These developmental aspects serve as guidelines for learning planning. Learning strategies emphasize active learning. Schools must provide sufficient areas or spaces for children to play, move, and participate in activities that support their physical and social growth. Assessment involves observing developmental aspects, including monitoring children's behavior, attitudes, social interactions, and work results. These observations are important to understand the progress and needs of each child during the learning process. Based on the study's results, it is recommended that the early childhood education curriculum explicitly includes all aspects of development that are developed through active play and the provision of sufficient and comfortable space. Teachers always see children's development directly as a form of developmental assessment. In addition, parental involvement plays a very important role in providing information and guidance regarding the importance of holistic development of children from an early age.

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